

Malala Laila and Taliban in A Thousand Splendid Suns

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Abstract: The modern day Afghanistan can be identified with two distinct things or events. One is the emergence of Taliban - the terrorist group that prevailed over Afghanistan and the adjacent areas for about three decades. It proved to be a curse for humanity for its adherence to the strict Sharia Laws and its extreme implementation with dire consequences: death penalty, chopping of hands, stone pelting and killing or the public execution. The second significant event in the history of Afghanistan is the appearance of youngest Nobel Laureate of the World, Malala Yousafzai. Malala Yousafzai, though born in Pakistan, denounced the command of Taliban. She once questioned: How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education? She has survived an assassination attempt by Taliban; she is a social activist fighting for the rights of women and girls and their education. Sufferings of Malala are symbolic to the sufferings of women worldwide and especially of the women in Afghanistan - as Taliban had its origin and base in Afghanistan; in Pakistan it was expanding and from there it was getting political and financial assistance.

Keywords: Malala Laila, Taliban, Afghanistan, humanity, Sufferings

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's concept of "Third World and Anne McClintock's Notion of Double Colonization" indicates that women in the novels question the basic requirement of the identity rather existence of a woman without a man. Oppression of women to the extent of extortion and finally to execution has been skilfully portrayed by Khaled Hosseini in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which leaves the reader with an ache and compels him to think and rethink about the helplessness of human around the world. This is because of double colonization which is firstly discussed by Anna Rutherford and Kirsten Holst Petersen in 1986. It deals with the question of female visibility and their struggles in the primary male's world.

'Where We Once Belonged' by Sia Figiel talks about colonization of female - first by society and second inside her house. In Khaled Hosseini's writings all his female characters are victims of double colonization. All the time whether they are serving their male counterparts in the name and for the sake of family or they are subservient to nation at the altar of religion. In either case they are denied with their basic rights and necessities. They are not even allowed to go out without a man accompanying them. Under the patriarchal ideology which demands submission from women, as well as under the colonial power and Taliban's law, women of Afghanistan are highly oppressed. However, Hosseini's novels not only provide texts which deals with how the practice of religion in Afghanistan can be difficult but also present the extent of rebellion of the female characters to face the hardship of life, and to liberate themselves.

Although while portraying women, Hosseini had worked hard to portray the image of women as empowered, brave and sensitive. At the same time he showed the mindset of womankind on the basis of differences in their generations. He tried to show that not a single woman of his novel is sulky or submissive from inside. And all the time all of them are making their mind to free themselves from the prevailing circumstances. By doing this, they have definitely lost their natural tenderness and beauty as women, in course of facing and struggling through the hardship. Simultaneously, all of them have become daredevils to face the external execution in the name of religion, country and basically loyalty for the sake of relationship.

Hosseini writes with rare intensity. In his second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* he constantly moves back and forth between his female characters, keeping his focus on them and not losing the track of plot. The book and its characters are interlaced with historical events with the time line ranging about 1975 to the American invasion. Andrea Dworkin writes that gender role "predetermines who we are, how we behave, what we are willing to know and what we are able to feel. We are born into a sex role which is determined by visible sex or gender". The gender roles in Afghan culture are depicted in *The Kite Runner* as the condition and status of Taliban in society. And it again changed as Taliban lost power in the country. So sometimes it becomes difficult to judge the actual condition of women. But Khaled Hosseini has left the readers in ambiguity by the condition and safety of children irrespective of gender in *The Kite Runner*. The method of story-telling through the novels, Khaled Hosseini suggests that beneath the appearance of submission, Afghan women have got every chance to reincarnate and reinvent themselves. They strive to be free and their unshakable belief to overcome the adversities have proved them warriors. The female characters of Hosseini have taken all the attempts to shift the idea of stereotypical suppression to modern opportunities for escaping themselves. In all the senses women are portrayed as fighters and brave creatures who are determined to win against the continuous challenges.

Hosseini's interest in Afghan women's condition and their quest for liberty arose when he revisited Kabul, Afghanistan in 2003; it was 23 years after he had left his homeland. Before this trip Khaled Hosseini had already become an established writer, as he had shown his talent in his first book *The Kite Runner*. *The Kite Runner* had become the *New York Times* best seller. He, then, was planning to take up his next book otherwise. But after visiting Afghanistan and witnessing the difficulties in daily life for basic necessities, particularly for

women, he decided to focus on women and their desire for freedom and identity in his second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. In an interview conducted by *hpr.com*, he shared some of his experiences by meeting the women in Kabul, "When I went there and I saw the enormity of the suffering that people had gone through..... you wonder why you were spared all of that and whether you have made good use of the fortune that for sheer luck you have been granted". In another interview with Book Browse he spoke, "*A thousand Splendid Suns* is in some ways, a more ambitious book than my first novel..... I was performing a perpetual balancing act in writing about the intimate, the inner lives of the characters - and depicting the external world that exerts pressure on the characters and forces their fates" (12).

In order to get better understanding of women characters in Hosseini's novel, we need to first unfold technique of story-telling. Similar to Hosseini Norwegian journalist Anse Seierstad's portrayal of women is also appealing because she took a chance to do a direct interaction with people in Afghanistan. This was actually some weeks after 9/11 occurred, Seierstad took a risk to meet people and be or act as one of them by wearing a burqa. She made the people realise that she is one amongst them and then she did her research work by experiencing all those that they went through, by her own self. She was surprised to feel the pressure which she also experienced underneath her coverage. The limitations imposed upon women in the name of patriarchy and safety was unbelievable. Seierstad, like Hosseini decided to write her experiences of Afghan women and wrote *The bookseller of Kabul* to share her own views. *The bookseller of Kabul* tries to give an authority to its characters to unfold their realities with the individual stories. Each story reflects human identity. Seierstad explains this in her interview. She states, "The family is the single most important institution in Afghan culture.... If we can't understand the Afghan family, we can't understand Afghanistan." (Hill 2010). It seems, Seierstad, like Hosseini became the part of Afghan families in order to experience and undergo every circumstance - pre Taliban and post Taliban - for better understandings and tell all those which have been untold and unknown. Women in Hosseini's novels play different roles as they define different values. Mariam follows the tradition and culture where as Laila refuses to follow them. On the other hand, the desires of escape and freedom of both the females are same and this is the only reason for their unified bond. Picturization of characters is so real that sometime the reader forgets that he is not the part of situation but a reader. Every character leaves a deep impact on reader - the feeling of empathy is generated automatically. The situations are difficult to forget and forgo. Hosseini is a man with mission, but his constant attempt to make the entire world realise the actual condition of Afghanistan through this book is a commendable job. Running a foundation after his name in Afghanistan and being engaged in helping the orphans, he never appeared as important and surprising as we got him through his novels. His stories satisfy his deeds. The breathtakingly canvas in which he has drawn every character so appropriately and significantly that he makes the reader feel the helplessness of being the citizen of different country and thanking their absence from Afghanistan as well.

The web of religion, politics and terrorism is so tightly knitted that every character is screaming for escape. But again the chance of rebuilding of their country, happiness among their people and safe future for their children have always been counted on. Hosseini's characters are definitely patriotic. The degree of 'hope' is incredible in Hosseini's characters. They never lose 'hope'. Hope to be free, hope to be united, and hope to be happy again. It touches the highest quotient of emotion of the readers.

The books of Hosseini present a record of discrimination against women in Afghanistan in the name of ethnic changing, which first introduced as religion then proved to be a compulsion. Over a period of time it used to be practiced as the identity for women. This was an attempt to snatch the basic necessity to read, to nurse on even to go out on one's desire; slowly and gradually it emerged as the tendency of growing Afghanistan. Control over women was practiced as an essential tenet of life-cycle. Women belong to men and men has got authority to make them do what they want, started following in the blood of Afghan people. This mentality was being passed through generations. The behaviour of Laila's second child Zalmai with Rashid is an example of that. Zalmai developed the habit of condemning Laila and Aziza if even his smallest demands had not been fulfilled. He also started thinking himself as an authority over women as his father did. By beating Aziza or his yelling over women promoted in him with the sense of power which he had been witnessing all the time. Even at very young age he had managed to understand the difference of genders - based on their deeds and performance.

The suffering of women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has brought these women characters so close that they have forgotten all the natural gaps of their age, past experiences and power. The only relation which developed over a period of time was based on pain and suffering. Laila had been given a priority over Mariam but the joy or jealousy had not been very long, as compared to pain and suffering. Mariam knew that how the condition of women alters in men's life as she had witnessed the betrayal of women by a man in the name of love and faith. Her life also was one of those. Women have only one role to perform - they are to perform only whatever is allotted or offered to them; they are to survive on disposal of men; and men's suppression of women has been a behavioural practice in Afghanistan. As for men, the condition outside gets tough to tolerate; the women inside go through bigger trauma created by them. Taliban had pledged to redefine Afghanistan after the

Soviets. Suffering, oppression, violence were reaching to the highest by Talibis in the name of religion. The hope of countrymen was dying once again as they were also upholding the new horizons of culture from which they were in oblivion. There was a new definition of following the principles of Islam. They were unfamiliar with the new interpretation of their religious identity which was being imposed to practice by Taliban upon the countrymen.

As in the Afghan tradition, the wall of barrier for women had already been very big but after the intervention of Taliban it presumed to be huge. The honour code was pushed high and those who were not willing to follow had to undergo tremendous torture. The honour code which enforces traditional values like respecting and obeying parents or spouses and following their decisions. When it comes to marriage, 'Afghan holds strict tradition and they make sure that their rules are being followed. Penelope Andrews notes that in 2010, 'the Taliban stoned to death a couple who chose to marry and eloped against the wishes of their parents'. Though Mariam in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* followed all the traditional values by being obedient firstly to her mother, then to her father and finally to her husband. She accepted her fate without questioning anyone and finding the basis as being the part of the community. But the spurs of being free had always been there and it was proved on different occasions; she always understood the value of freedom. On the other hand, the next generation of women are more visionary, risk-taker and powerful. They are a firm believer of their own capacity. Time and suffering have made them more practical and courageous. Laila is much more confident than Mariam. She plans everything according to her wish. Even when she had to marry Rashid, she understood that this was the most practical way of her survival and her lone child which had already been implanted in her womb by Tariq. She was so courageous that at her first night with Rashid she cut her finger and left stains of blood to prove her purity and chastity. She was an educated girl; she had to fulfil her father's dream as she wanted to educate her people and she was very firm about that. The way she was nurturing Aziza was marvellous. Despite all the oddities, she focussed on taking care of her child. The fate of being free was unshakable; she viewed life as an opportunity to be free as she was earning her life each day. The continuous attempt to pursue her goal and eyeing every chance as an opportunity to skip away, she was more rebellious and a silent reactionary. She was so courageous that even in that suppressive condition in Afghanistan she allowed herself to getting engaged in a sexual relationship of his childhood love Tariq. This act of hers proves that women of Afghanistan either risk their reputation by choosing their own journey to live or they would leave it in other's hand to decide the degree of torturous fate and unseen future for them.

Story-telling has played an important role in the growth and development of next generation women. Laila's father used to encourage her for further studies by enlightening her mind with fruitful ideas to educate and get educated. She had a stressful relation with her mother; her mother was an old generation lady. But she found herself helpless before soldiers who often took away their boys with them; and the boys never returned. This happened with many families but none of them could resist. This led to frustrate Laila's mother. All the time she passed in the state of remorse and guilt. But Laila, on other hand was growing her fullest under the shadow of her father's love and encouragement. Laila heard many stories about how female have escaped themselves from oddities and difficult circumstances. These stories were engraved in her mind and that led her to be heroic. She never lost her strength and courage in any adverse situation. She was always determined to overcome the oppression she had to undergo.

Afghan women have been the victims of its geographical condition too. Huge lack of vegetation and greenery left women with exactly half of the work for them as compared to the women from other part of the world. The opportunity of going outside of the house for work and help the male members is automatically vanished. So they could go out just for the urgency or not even for that. Lynn Walter and Manisha Desai reports "Due to lack of flourishing vegetation in the region, Afghanistan cultivates flourishing opium trade, such as heroin and cocaine. Since the country relies on heroin instead of vegetation for economic growth, its citizen run the risk of suffering from drug addiction problem or being abused by individuals addicted to such substances". As per the statistics by Deborah Ellis, "Afghanistan now produces 90% of world heroin ... and the number of opium addicts in Afghanistan is estimated at 1.5 million. In a country of 30 million people, that works out to one of the highest rates of addiction of any country in the world".

Because of the rising usage of opium and declining of agricultural system, women have been left with fewer opportunities to go outside and work. Citizens struggle for basic requirements such as food and lodging. For women, opportunity for education and learning, health, and other facilities have automatically gone down; there are very little or no chances to go out and earn. As a result, they themselves have started feeling safe inside the walls of their houses; they feel more comfortable within their household periphery; they have now started getting scared to face the male dominance outside on roads and in public sphere as well.

Lynn Walter and Manisha Desai point out.

The removal of skilled and educated urban women meant the closure of most schools because over 50% of teachers were women. It meant further deterioration of public health as women workers were sent home. It meant the near collapse of a badly maintained civil service as women were banned from public place

and forced to stay at home. Overall it intensified the social malaise gripping Afghanistan as a result of illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and disease. This quarantining of Afghan women proved that in the economic, education, health or religious growth of the country, women played equal part. One of the most important reasons for under-development is also that the country was forced to be battlefield even in 20th century. It was not able to make itself free. One after the other groups invaded and tried to rule; entire country paid the price.

In 1996, new Taliban government took over; it was dead against the women emancipation. Taliban were the hardcore Sunni Muslims and strong followers of Sharia law. In order to enforce the Sharia law, they mercilessly banned the normal living of women, like education, playing, going to school and market place, working in offices, participation in social function and politics etc. Men were automatically the decision makers and they started making their own principles to rule over women. This started being practiced in a cyclic order. If the husband passed away son automatically took the charge even if women is alive.

Ruth M. Butler and Angelica R. Martinez explain how the role of patriarchal structure influences family life:

The patriarchal structure...the concept of endogamy, or marrying with one's own lineage(was enforced) in order to retain inheritance rights for men....a father exercised control over his wife and children and when he died, the eldest son or another male relatives such as brother, would assume control of family and societal performances for male children over female was directly associated with the male's enhanced ability to support the family and assure the continuity of the family since descent in patriarchal societies is traced through male blood lines. Since women were always targeted, they chose to cover themselves in the name of tradition. First, they had to protect themselves from outsiders; then from men within their own families; and afterwards from their countrymen. Sometimes veil protected them from further torture. According to Sahar Amer,

Islam did not invent veiling, nor veiling a practice specific to Muslims. Rather veiling is a tradition that has existed from thousands of years.... throughout history.....Veiling has been a custom associated with women, men and sacred places and objects". Further he writes: "Married women and concubines accompanying their mistresses were required to veil their head when going out in public....slaves were prohibited from veiling and could incur punishment if they did ... (and) a veiled woman signalled an aristocratic lady who did not need to go out for work, unlike peasant women or slaves.

Citizen of Afghanistan were facing the consequences by losing their own countrymen, family members, friends in this war. Life style of country-side people were affected the most. They were forced to stay within the walls. Young boys from families were snatched and pressurised on gunpoint to take part in invasion of soviets. Many people died. The left ones were compelled to escape. Such was the case of Tariq, a male character in *A thousand splendid suns*. He has to leave his country, people, property, his belongings for the safety of his family. Laila had also convinced her father to leave the place though her mother was reluctant as she wanted to die in the same land where her sons had died. Finally, she too gets convinced to go to Pakistan. The final day arrives when they are to leave Afghanistan but this happens to be the very last day in Laila's parents' life as they got killed in a rocket blast.

Mariam was the witness of all the childhood incidents of Laila. She had witnessed her friendship with Tariq, her going out with father, her mourning mother and finally planning to escape to Pakistan. The war had left Afghanistan with very few populations. Rashid being the only man nearby, and also known to Laila, decided to marry her. Now by marrying Rashid both sides of the coin of the Afghan society were exposed. Rashid's marriage with Laila, which was his second one, was definitely an example of patriarchy as he was almost 30 years older to her. He had no children with Mariam and this desire had also been fulfilled by marrying Laila, irrespective of age and class. Rashid had also the rights and authorities in his hand - to order what he wanted from both the women - Marriam and Laila. First he pampered faith as he did with Mariam, but he couldn't bear the free spirit of women as he already had objections with the freedom Laila accessed to in her father's life; he very soon started condemning her. One day while abusing Laila physically, Rashid mentioned that he knew Aziza is not his child but a bastard of Tariq and Laila. Laila had this fear deep inside her that someday she must face the truth. But certain time passed and Aziza had grown up and Laila loved her to the moron and back. Seeing Aziza growing so lovely and beautiful day by day was more than enough for Laila bear all the abuses of Rashid. Aziza was the last and only token of her love to Tariq.

A Thousand Splendid Suns showcased the birth of a new Afghanistan The entry to Taliban gave new definition to everything. The whole dynamics of politics, education, religion, entertainment changed. They unleashed the new kingdom of terror. They started imposing their rules which was right according to them. New rules were made for children and women. Girls and women were not allowed to move outside. All women who had to leave their houses must be accompanied by 'Mahram'. Public transport will be segregated - - separate buses for men and women. Women and girls must wear burqa. Women and girls are forbidden to wear bright coloured clothes beneath their burqa. Nail polish, lipsticks and make-ups are forbidden. A woman can't take taxi unless she is accompanied by Mahram. No male doctor is permitted to touch the body of women under the pretext of consultation. A woman may not go to men's tailor. A young woman may not engage in the

conversation with a young man. If they do so, they must be married immediately after this breach. Engaged women may not go to a beauty salon, even during the preparation for marriage. No merchant is permitted to sell women's undergarments. All offenders under the decrees of the Sharia law will be punished on the public square.

If women had to go through a protected phase of brutality and humiliation, it did not mean that man were spared of such barbarities and atrocities. Men were forced to grow beards and shave moustache; they were directed to be properly attired in public. They imposed the wearing of salwar, baggy trousers long enough to cover ankles. Hence dress code symbolizes the curtailment of liberty for men also. Laila also describes the announcement for men in her memory:

According to Sharia law, men must grow their beard and cut their moustaches. Men must wear a turban or white beret on this head. Suits and ties are forbidden. Traditional Afghan dresses must be wearing. Any person in possession of firearm must deposit this at a military post or at the nearest mosque. All Muslims must say their prayers at the specific times and in the place, they find themselves. Displaying photos of human and animals are forbidden. Muslim families may not listen to music, even during a wedding ceremony.

Families are prohibited from taking photos or making videos, even during marriage. It is forbidden for non-Muslim name to be given to babies.

All non-Muslims, that are Hindus and few, must wear yellow garments or some yellow clothes. Their house must be a yellow flag so that they are recognizable. No merchant may sell alcohol. When the police are punishing offenders, no one has right to question or criticize their action. All offenders against the decrees of the Sharia law will be punished on the public square. Whistling kettles are prohibited. Dogs and birds are prohibited."

Mariam symbolizes the traditional women where as Laila represents the modern ones. But their upbringing and courage are basically interdependent. Laila could not achieve her desire without the help of Mariam. On other hand, Mariam, suffered in hands of all those males who came across in her journey of life, be it her father, husband or her step son. She endured with her tradition and patience. Her patience and silence was her true strength. Her power to tolerate had made her husband loose his patience many-a-times. Though the distribution of duties on the basis of gender represented women dependent, subsequent weak and creature to be controlled and sealed. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* draws a beautiful picture of both the women who, in silence and ignorance to pain, give a new definition of tolerance. Hosseini has painted these women with very strong colours which reflect the quest of freedom, strength and courage. By reading every page, Hosseini leaves his reader with a surprise of his female characters. Every emotion of his women characters is very strong. In the beginning when character of Nana has been introduced, the level of hatred towards the man ...from whom she was impregnate, was very certain and unshakable. She was so sure by his infidelity and betrayal, that Mariam leaving for him gave her biggest shock of her life. Nana always warned Mariam by saying "Remember this now and keep remember, my daughter: Like a compass needle that points north, the index finger of man is also always stretched to accused women. Always remember this Mariam". "Men's heart is very different from mother's womb, Mariam. Womb will not bleed or stretched because they have to take you in". Women like her suffer....how can we bear all our burdens in silence".

One of the main ideas which these novels give is that modernity and tradition can't sail on same boat. Traditional values have to be compromised or at least ignored somewhat to adopt modernism. Though, the degree and value of it keep changing person to person. Laila a depiction of modern women as being an educated, free spirited, happy and independent girl and despite of tolerating all the Rashid's abuses, dreamt of escaping away or actually waited rather hoped for Tariq to come and take her away. On the other hand Mariam being a dutiful wife to a mad man and tolerating his obsession of having a baby boy was still angry and unable to accept Laila as his second wife. She says "I do not want it". "You have many years made me as a first wife".... "I do not allow it". But her entire protest was silent and finally ignored. She was aske by Rashid to take care of Laila as she had survived a blast. In the beginning she always thought Laila was ungrateful and was disrespectful towards her, but she was still bound by the tradition of following her husband's commands. Laila was also abused by the Rashid but she retaliated which Mariam could never do. Both were the victims of situation but Laila refused to be colonized inside the house. For the outer world she could not do much but inside her house she was fighting her best. Her deeds were based on her upbringing which was in the context of her status and which was modern and very much advanced. She knew that she is carrying Tariq's baby and she had nobody left for her. She was also aware of what was going on outside so she agreed to marry Rashid. That was her smart play for survival of herself and the baby inside her. She was the one who asked Rashid to arrange their wedding as soon as possible. Again at their wedding night she befools Rashid by cutting her finger tip and leaving stains of blood on the bed sheet as proving herself a virgin.

Rashid looks awkward. Her fingers struggle endlessly to open his shirt.... Though chattering teeth, Laila asks Rashid to turn off the light, in silence, after feeling Rashid is asleep, Laila reaches under the bed and pull out a knife. She cuts the tip of her finger and let her blood drops on the sheet where they sleep together. (33)

Marriam and Laila had a gap of a generation. Laila's behaviour shows that she can overcome almost all the adversities, which surely, she did. The change of generation in Afghanistan even in amidst the ongoing war, developed new type of women, who had learnt to react. Marriam learnt a lot from Laila dealing with Rashid. Laila's child with Rashid turned to be a spoilt one. Rashid used to fulfil his demands by ignoring the basic needs of the house. His behaviour towards his women was being worst day by day. He used to torture little Aziza all the times. And this made Laila hating him more.

The behaviour of Zalmai towards his sister was also very disturbing for Laila and Marriam. This was because Rashid was bringing up Zalmai in his own way. He learnt to behave like his father. As Rashid was treating his women, Zalmai also felt the same way. Emotion was suppressed and demanding side developed as he was witnessing his father's abusive behaviour to his wives. Laila never entertained Zalmai's behaviour but his threatening of complaining to Rashid used to leave her surprised. Afghanistan promoted this kind of behaviour of men towards his women. Boys were trained to perform in a specific way with women or girls. This was called tradition injustice. The incidents in Hosseini's novel gives the readers' cycles of injustice and torture while analysing the attitude of women in the novel by the perspective of literary feminism, we find that it has developed in many shades.

All the female characters are very much deprived and suppressed; all of them want an escape or wish to be free but some are able to a some rather many are not. Every older generation, warns the younger generation to beware. They have suffered a lot on the name of religion and culture, so they feel that new generation shall be escaped and spared. And education is the only way to find that freedom. According to Nana, the mother of Marriam,

Learn? Learn what, mullah sahibi? Nana said sharply "What is there to learn? She shaped her eyes towards Marriam. Marriam looked down at her hands. "What the sense schooling a girl like you? It's like shining a spittoon. And you will learn nothing of value in those schools. There is only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don't teach it in school. Look at meonly one skill. And it's this: tahamul endure. (*A thousand splendid suns*, 17)

Nana was already suffering from the anxiety and from her past. She always thought and wished Marriam to understand the possibilities of sufferings which can come from any side; the only escape for women is being either rich or educated. Marriam herself felt the same when she felt to live with Jalil in his house after his mother's death. All three wives hated her and she started feeling the word 'Harami'. She finally understood the meaning of this word by the behaviour of others' legitimate relations present in Jalil's house. The women were so fascinating, the children were so privileged that the presence of Marriam felt vanished as she was highly ignored and made felt problematic. When there was a final decision of Marriam getting married to a man who was 30 years older to her that to a widower left Marriam speechless and shocked. Marriam witnessed that how Jalil has kept Marriam in front of his wives. Marriam was only fifteen and she was being forced to be married, where Jalil's other daughters were preparing to read further and go to universities, who were of the same age as even elder to Marriam. She was reminded of nan's words, "Lot in life" ... "its lot in life, Marriam women like us. We endure it's all we have. Do you understand? Besides they will laugh at you in the school. They will , they will call you Harami".

The innocence of Marriam was suppressed when she was bound to marry Rashid, who was a shoemakers and a mentality of certainly an oppressor as he says "It annoys me to see man whose lost control of his wife". Marriam's position in her father's life have been understood by Rashid and he knew that she is his illegitimate child from whom they want to escape by treatment towards Marriam had always been demonstrated that way. He never could give a proper or basic lifestyle to her thought he never wanted to do that also. Rashid was super obsessed with a male child as he has lost one from her first wife. She treated Marriam as his commodity and a machine to bear his children. It was unfortunate from Mrriam's side that after several attempts she could not carry children even by being pregnant with them. She faced multiple miscarriages. So this has been one other major cause of hating Marriam by her husband Jalil. Marriam always had understood the value of education. She always dreamt of being educated also. But destiny had its cruelty on the height for her. Her innocence compelled her to dream of the different world outside. Her day dreamt her life at school when she was with Nana also:

Since then, thought of classrooms and teachers had settled around Marriam head, images of notebooks with lined papers, column of numbers and pens that made dark, heavy marks. She pictured herself in the classroom with other girls her age. Marriam longed to a place a ruler on page and draw important looking lines". (ATSS, 28)

She was innocent that she got envious to birds by the freedom they enjoyed. She was also free spirited from inside but her circumstances never let her be. She so being excited and happy went to Jalil's house, but being rejected by her father's wife and above all Falil not being on her side, broke Mariam from inside. She was made return to her village, where by coming back she found Nana hanging herself and making her alone. In Jalil's house she missed her Nana's protection and possessiveness. Mariam was felt cheated and devastated. She is being pushed to a marriage which she is never ready and which is going to prove super abusive one in future. Wives of Jalil were convincing her to marry Rashid. She wanted to study but when basic identity was on stake, how could she be demanding. The females of Jalil's made sure that Mariam gets the toughest life, as they had got the opportunity to take revenge of her mother, relationship with Jalil, "Now he is little older than you". ... chimed in "But he can't be more than ... forty. forty-five at most wouldn't you say, Nargis?" "Yes. But I have seen nine-year-old girls given to men twenty years older than you suitor, Marriam. We all have. What are you, fifteen? That's good solid marrying age for girl".

There were enthusiasts nodding at this. It did not escape. Mariam that no mention was made of her half-sisters Saadeh or Naheed, both her own age, both students is the Mehri School in Heart, both with plans to enrol in Kabul university, fifteen, evidently, was not a good, solid marrying age for them". This discrimination with her and depriving Mariam of one of her basic rights by Jalil and his family left her devastated. She had very well understood the power of education as she could now see the difference in the upbringing between herself and half-sisters. She always thought that Jalil will set her free from Nana's jail but what Jalil did with her, made her Miss Nana more. Laila being another important character of the novel has made understand the value of education from her early life itself. Her father was a school teacher. She was certainly a privileged young girl. Babi made it clear to Laila that the most important thing in life after her safety was her schooling.

I know you are still young, but I want you to understand and learn this now, he said marriage can wait education cannot. You are a very bright girl. Truly you are. You can be anything you want. Laila, I know this about you. And also that when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you as much as its men, may be even more, because society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated. Laila no chance. (35)

But Laila did not tell Hasina that Babi has told all this thing, or how glad she was to have a father like him, or how proud she was of his regard for her, or how determined. She was to pursue her education just as he had his. For the last two years, Laila had received the Awal Numra certificate - given yearly to a top-ranked student in each grade. Laila imbibes modern day attitude and her performance certifies that she is so courageous that she over took all the challenges in her life. Her life is an example of utter misery and full of adversity, but the girls promise of survival from her own self and keep fighting on the basis every day every moment is inerrable. She enjoyed all ... her childhood like a normal girl would do. The encouragement of her father, her relatives, her neighbours, her friends was really very high. She has seen a happy Afghanistan and enjoyed the fullest with her loved ones, so understand the value of her country's needs. Meanwhile her father gives a very good picture of the future of the country and that got engraved in her heart. Her mother at the same time hated to be a part of this place, because it took both of her boys on the name of war, though she refused to leave the place. But Laila ignoring everything and keeping her father's word in her mind enjoyed every bit of her stay in Afghanistan before the blast socked her life.

Nana learnt betrayal from men. She always taught Mariam to save her from men, especially the rich ones. She by her own experiences told Mariam that life outside her village was dangerous and it would be very difficult for her to survive. She cared a lot about her daughter though Mariam being the young girl could never understand her mother's concern, which she definitely did when her mother died and Jalil did to her. The illiterate mother also tried to pass some information by her learning from life. She was saving her life by not going out, even to school as other will call her 'harami' and tease her. But Nana also understood the value of education very well as she had observed everything in Jalil's lifestyle. Mariam used to take lesson of Quran from mullah Faizal as she got married to Rashid to face the cruellest colour of life.

Through her life and own experiences Mariam learnt a word 'Endure'. This was a word often used by Nana to give her the reality check. She saw Laila when she was young. She witnessed a relation of a father and a daughter, which was between Laila and her Babi. This was very new understanding relation by Mariam. A father can be so promising and being with her daughter so enthusiastically was all new for her. Laila shared a very lovely bond with her father; there was no fear of losing and lying. There was unseen presence of protection and security which Laila's father provided her was incredible. Laila could do what she wanted and there was no one to judge her. But when Laila had to face all those things which Mariam faced and sometimes even more, Mariam being an elder taught her what she had learnt 'Endure'.

So learning has always been a quest or freedom and both become the two sides of a coin. If women of Afghanistan have to be free, they have to learn almost all the life skills or educate themselves to the extent of being free and letting others be free. Hosseini's character did the same thing. Nana made her free by killing herself. She learnt endurance from her life though she could not bear the adversities and learning of Mariam. So

she set herself free from the pain. Mariam killed Rashid. By enduring the pain and suffering her entire life, she finally refused to surrender in front of her own fateful fate. And in reply to recurrent attacks of Rashid, she killed him. She again found it far easier to get executed than to suffer Rashid conversions. Mariam saved Laila and her children's life. This was the only way she could help them. The emotional bond which engrossed the two ladies is very touching and the writer has very beautifully presented it. We keep falling for Mariam and Laila again and again.

When Laila got physically abused by Rashid once, she tells Mariam, "I won't, I couldn't let him....I wasn't raised in a household where people did this like that". Her statement shows that she wants to resist, verbally and physically both. She refused to stay inactive and endure all what Rashid was doing to her. Many times she reacted on his face while she went to meet Aziza in an orphanage and he stopped her going there. She screamed "You can't stop me. Do you hear me? You can't hit all you want but I will keep going there". This was her reply to Rashid. When Taliban chased her, she again was determined to be punished but she never stop meeting Aziza or going out. She was ready to face anything and everything.

When she left Afghanistan happily with Tariq and went to Pakistan, she was never at peace. She always missed her own country. She missed her childhood, she missed Babi, and she missed Mariam the most. Her return to Afghanistan, by giving away her peaceful and safer life in Pakistan, is not conceivable, normally. But her step to return makes her the hero again. Her suffering, her miseries, the difficulties in Afghanistan could not shake her ideologies; she adhered to her ideology of restructuring the nation, reconstructing the community; she maintained her intention, strength and commitment to overcome the situations. For the sake of her father's dreams and to fulfil them, and to do more for women of her country she chose to return. "Laila, I know when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you as much as its men, may be even more, because the society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated" (56).

By chanting these words of her Babi, Laila returned to her Watan, her Afghanistan and served as a teacher - educating everyone. Laila - advocating women education and their empowerment - is the incarnation of The Malala of Afghanistan. Malala - a Pushto - Pashtun - Pathan - Afghan - Afghanistan origin- is represented by Laila - bearing the torch of education and enlightenment in war- ravaged Afghanistan in the Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Malala Yousafzai has now become an institution; Laila is the symbol of the 'Institution Malala'.

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